



DECISION NOTICE
Missouri River/Cascade County Merriam's Turkey Transplant EA

Prepared by: Region 4 Wildlife Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405

December 5, 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen:

You recently received documents regarding a proposal to trap wild Merriam's turkeys from existing wild populations in eastern Montana and release up to 75 birds in suitable habitat along the Missouri River south of Ulm in Cascade County. Partnering with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) on the project is the National Wild Turkey Federation and area Landowners. Comments received regarding the proposal are summarized in the following Decision Notice.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS

FWP is required to assess the impacts of the proposal to the human and physical environment. The Missouri River Cascade County turkey transplant proposal and its effects were documented by FWP in an Environmental Assessment (EA) to satisfy the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

A 30-day public comment period on the EA was held from November 3, 2007 to December 3, 2007. Articles and legal notices of the proposed action were written in area newspapers. A local news channel aired the proposal, also notifying the public on how to comment. The EA could also be viewed on FWP's website. About 35 copies of the Environmental Assessment were mailed or delivered to sportsmen groups, government agencies and other interested parties. A total of 21 Landowners in the project area were contacted prior to the proposal being formalized and agreements were made to allow the transplant and subsequent turkey hunting should populations reach a huntable level. All Landowners in the project area received a copy of the EA. The proposal was also presented to the following Great Falls area sportsmen groups: Missouri River Gobblers Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Great Falls Chapter Safari Club International (SCI), Russell County Sportsmen Association and Upper Missouri River Chapter Pheasants Forever (PF) having full support from all.

ISSUES RAISED IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

The EA lists issues in detail. The proposed project, if successful, will establish a viable population of wild Merriam's turkeys in an area they currently do not inhabit. This project will provide additional recreational opportunities to the public who has shown an increasing interest for wild turkeys in Montana. Benefits of the project include expanded opportunities for the public and Landowners to hunt/view/listen to wild turkeys, improved Landowner relations with FWP and the

public, and potential added revenue to the local economy from expenditures by turkey hunters and viewers. The impacts of possible damage to grain haystacks and hunter problems can be mitigated through the FWP game damage policy, the FWP Block Management Program and through possible assistance from local NWTF, PF and SCI chapters.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

Sportsmen in general have been very supportive of efforts in transplanting turkeys in Montana. The Missouri River Gobblers Chapter of the NWTF, the Great Falls Chapter SCI and the Upper Missouri River PF Chapter expressed intense interest and offered financial and physical assistance in any trapping and transplanting activities, along with future funding of potential game damage problems should any arise. Russell County Sportsmen Association likewise strongly supported the proposed project. Written or electronic comments were received from 74 individual sportsmen. All were in support of the project. An additional 34 comments were received one day after the comment period deadline, all supporting the project. Two individuals questioned future hunting access in the project area since the area is almost entirely private land. An explanation of the 21 Landowner agreements prior to proposing the project was given in telephone responses to those individuals.

DECISION

Utilizing the EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP, which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposal. There is overall support for this proposed project from all affected parties. Sportsmen are also supportive as they stand to gain additional recreational opportunities in the local area. The FWP Commission's final approval is contingent on sufficient Landowner commitment to allow reasonable hunting opportunities in the future should populations reach huntable levels. Transplant success is also dependent on having a large enough contiguous suitable habitat land base.

After review of this project proposal and the corresponding public comments, it is my recommendation to proceed with transplanting wild turkeys to the Cascade County project area as described in the EA, subject to final approval by the FWP Commission. The Draft EA for this proposal will be considered the Final EA.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti /s/

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